

VZCZCXRO1568  
OO RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMA RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHAN #1215/01 3370524  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 030524Z DEC 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0739  
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 001215

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E AND AF/FO  
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [CN](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER COMORAN PRESIDENT AZALI ON SAMBI'S MISCUES

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Former President Azali told the Ambassador the Union should negotiate with Anjouan's Colonel Bacar for the sole purpose of organizing elections on the island. Azali said President Sambi and the African Union had miscalculated in dealing with Bacar, but thought a solution was still possible. He believed Bacar was tired and looking for a way out. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) In the quiet setting of his wooded backyard in Moroni, former Comoran President Azali Assoumani spoke candidly on the Anjouan impasse with the Ambassador. In a history of 19 successful and attempted coups d'etat, Azali is in a tiny club of Comoran presidents who survived to retirement. Having taking power in a coup himself in 1999 following Anjouan's attempted secession two years earlier, Azali restored the Union and held fair elections in 2002; where he was elected. When he handed power to current President Ahmed Sambi in May 2006, it was the first peaceful and democratic transition since independence in 1975.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador commended Azali on his service to the Comoros, not only ceding power peacefully after the 2006 election, but also establishing the first university in the Comoros, maintaining stability, and improving security. The Ambassador noted that we have not forgotten his expulsion of the el-Haramein islamist NGO which has ties to terrorist organizations. Azali, still popular among Comorans for these successes (and his corrupt government forgotten), maintains a low profile. Despite Azali's unique position as one-time reconciler, it appears the Sambi government has not sought his counsel.

Anjouan Impasse: Talks Needed

- - - - -

¶4. (SBU) The former president mentioned his credentials as unifier in the Comoros: after his coup d'etat he negotiated a reconciliation agreement to return Anjouan to the Union; passed a new Constitution by referendum; and held fair elections. With the exception of his coup, which he acknowledged several times neither apologetically nor defensively, Azali emphasized dialogue and compromise. He said the Comoros will not develop without reconciliation; Sambi's grave error, he said, was to have assumed Anjouan was no longer a problem. He agreed that Sambi, as an Anjouan native, initially was perceived to have an advantage dealing with the island and with Colonel Bacar. Many were proved wrong as the 2007 island elections approached and Sambi failed to reach a deal with Bacar to hold elections in Anjouan. In short, Sambi thought the reconciliation was "done", concentrated on development instead of reconciliation, and thus missed an opportunity to continue the healing process after his landslide victory in 2006, Azali lamented.

15. (SBU) Moving to the problems of Comoros' federalist ("competences") arrangements, Azali defended his decision near the end of his tenure not to promulgate a law on Union and island security forces. Handing this hot potato to his successor, Azali said he advised Sambu to go back to parliament and ask for an improved law. Sambu did not do so; rather he promulgated the law Azali saw as defective. As a result, Anjouan still maintains a standing army which Colonel Bacar refuses to give up, posing a constant threat to any Union President. Sambu also was unable to apply its provisions for division of powers between police and military. The former president identified this to be Sambu's key early mistake, hoping for the best and demonstrating weakness.

16. (SBU) Turning to the current impasse, Azali said it must be accepted that Colonel Bacar is the de facto authority in Anjouan. Azali said unequivocally that negotiations between the Union and Bacar must be held; solely for the purpose of organizing Anjouan's election. He assessed Anjouan's population as not/not supporting separatism, unlike the 1997 secession crisis. Azali further said Bacar was tired, fragile, and looking for an exit.

17. (SBU) Given these circumstances, Azali hinted that the Union government had some leverage. However, he said Sambu and the African Union made a "stupid mistake" by postponing only the Anjouan election last June, given that the constitution requires all Island elections to be held simultaneously; he said this error now allows Bacar to accuse Sambu of having acted unconstitutionally, and therefore to call for new elections on all three islands, not just Anjouan. Azali's other sharp criticism against the AU was directed at the recent public suggestion by AU Negotiator Madeira that the mandate of the AU's MAES forces - 200 Tanzanian soldiers sent last June to oversee elections, who are still in Moroni - could be changed, as circumstances warrant, to include participation in an

ANTANANARI 00001215 002 OF 002

invasion force. He said Madeira's comment significantly stirred up hopes among Comorans that the AU was prepared to resolve the current Anjouan problem by force. Azali was categorical in denouncing any military action against Anjouan as "unnecessary, insufficient, and undesirable." As a former soldier, he also said a military assault by sea would fail.

Beyond Anjouan: Mayotte  
- - - - -

18. (SBU) Azali also raised the key nationalist issue for all Comorans, French Mayotte, declaring, "the Comoros will never be stable until Mayotte is returned to the country." He noted the people of Anjouan live with insufficient land, no opportunity, on one dollar a day - a mere 30 KM from Mayotte's wealthy, if "artificial," economy. Like most Comoran leaders, Azali emphasized the economic disparity between the Comoros and Mayotte and alleged France's authority over that island was unfair. He said that Mayotte is the root cause of the current Anjouan crisis as it prevents Comorans from seeing themselves as one nation: "if Mayotte is not necessarily Comoran, then what island is?" He offered little on how the Comorans could negotiate Mayotte's return, or why France would ever consider it.

19. (SBU) Comment: While much of what Azali is saying now is interesting Monday morning quarterbacking, his comments were tinged throughout with genuine disappointment over the Sambu government's current difficulties. Looking forward, his perception of remaining room for negotiation with Bacar over Anjouan is hopeful. His outright dismissal of military action as a potential solution is perhaps indicative of what current military leadership also thinks - but of course cannot say - about popular demands to end the crisis by force. End Comment.

MARQUARDT